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**EXPERT TO DISCUSS FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER**

*Dan Dubovsky to Speak Jan. 12 in Richmond about Alcohol's Lifelong Effects on Children*

(RICHMOND, Va.)--When Dan Dubovsky talks about the devastating effects of alcohol on infants, he is speaking from first-hand experience. He is a specialist in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the father of a son who was born with FASD. On Jan. 12, he will share his insights and knowledge of FASD with area health care providers beginning at 4 p.m. at The Place at Innsbrook, 4036-C Cox Road.

FASD is an umbrella term that describes the range of effects that can occur in children whose mothers drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects include mental retardation, learning difficulties and behavioral problems. It is estimated that nearly 72,000 Virginians have FASD and that 1,005 Virginia children are born with it each year. Total annual costs to Virginia from FASD are estimated to be \$189.3 million.

"FASD is the leading preventable cause of babies with mental retardation," said Dubovsky. "The good news is that it is 100 percent preventable when women don't drink alcohol while they are pregnant."

"No level of alcohol during pregnancy has been proven safe," said Joan Corder-Mabe, director of the Division of Women's and Infants' Health in the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Office of Family Health Services. "Women should not drink alcohol if they are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or at risk of becoming pregnant."

The effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), a widely known condition associated with FASD, last a lifetime. Babies with FAS are abnormally small and remain undersized as they grow older. Their heart and brain may not form properly. Most have some degree of mental disability, poor coordination and a short attention span. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, one baby with FAS can incur health costs as high as \$1.4 million over the course of their lives.

Dubovsky's presentation was arranged by the Virginia FASD Task Force to increase awareness among health providers of the wide-ranging effects of FASD.

"We hope to expand the FASD Task Force and explore ways to develop education and prevention efforts among women of childbearing age," said Corder-Mabe, who is directing VDH efforts to collect more precise data on FASD in Virginia.

The effort to prevent FASD is among the 50 preventive health programs in the Office of Family Health Services that promote and protect the health of Virginians across the span of their lifetime.

To learn more about FASD, visit [www.fascenter.samhsa.gov](http://www.fascenter.samhsa.gov) or [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com). For more information about the VDH Office of Family Health Services, visit [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov).

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